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Editorial

Attain more all-round victories this year

This 2008, the Party envisions a year of major all-round revolutionary advances. The brilliant victories and wealth of experience attained the previous year both in the legal struggle and armed revolution are bases for further advances in the Philippine revolution.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) was forced to admit during Oplan Bantay Laya (OBL) 2's first year that it failed to achieve its target of "crushing" a specified number of guerrilla fronts. Even before this admission, an internal AFP assessment leaked to the public stated that the current operation plan's predecessor OBL 1 likewise was a failure. Thus, the AFP's much-vaunted claims of having crushed 13 NPA guerrilla fronts in 2007 and its boasts of destroying another 17 guerrilla fronts in the first quarter of 2008 is pure hogwash. The AFP is bound to suffer even bigger defeats as the fires of people's war blaze throughout the country.

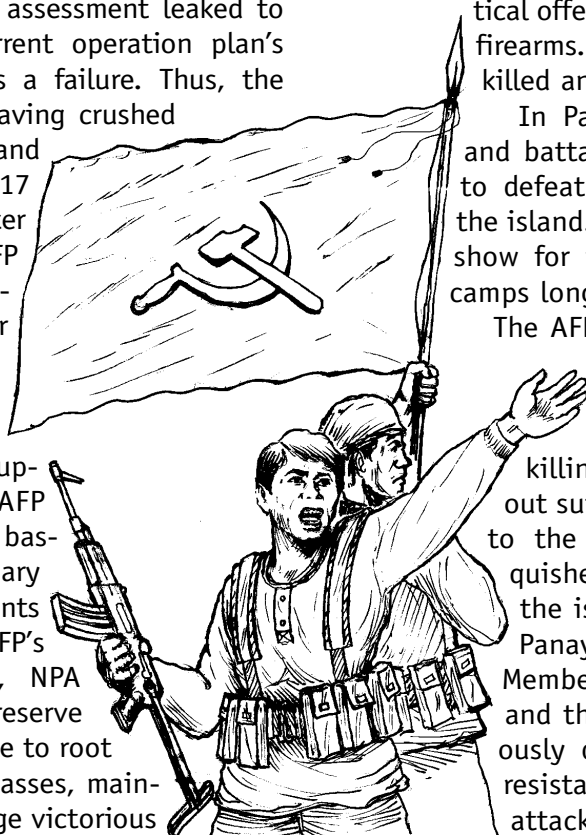
From Luzon to Mindanao, NPA units thwarted division-, brigade- and battalion-size suppression campaigns of the AFP launched to pulverize alleged bastions of the armed revolutionary movement. In the guerrilla fronts that suffered the brunt of the AFP's military saturation campaigns, NPA units were not only able to preserve themselves but were likewise able to root themselves deeper among the masses, maintain military initiative and emerge victorious

in their counter-attacks on the enemy. The NPA was also able to expand and to launch many tactical offensives in areas of relatively sparse enemy deployment.

One of the more striking experiences relate to how the NPA Pulang Diwata Command was able to confront and defeat the military campaign launched by the Philippine Army 4th Infantry Division in Northeastern Mindanao. The AFP's sustained military operations failed to crush the two priority guerrilla fronts targeted for attack. Red fighters were able to launch 42 tactical offensives in these fronts and seize 25 firearms. More than 103 AFP troops were killed and 50 wounded in these firefights.

In Panay, the AFP launched brigade- and battalion-size operations in an effort to defeat the revolutionary movement in the island. But in the end, all the AFP could show for its efforts were pictures of NPA camps long abandoned by the guerrillas.

The AFP's military saturation campaigns in the island gave Red fighters many opportunities to launch sniping and ambush operations, killing many enemy forces and without suffering a single casualty. Contrary to the AFP's claims that it had vanquished the revolutionary movement in the island, the revolutionary forces in Panay even expanded significantly. Members of the Party, the people's army and the revolutionary movement vigorously defended themselves and waged resistance in the face of vicious enemy attacks (*see related article*).



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In the Ilocos-Cordillera region, enemy forces suffered many casualties in the 22 major tactical offensives launched by the NPA and even in the three defensive actions where the NPA was able to seize the initiative. Up to 60 enemy troops were killed and 38 wounded. Four officers and soldiers of the AFP were also captured in these firefights.

These are but a few of the NPA's victorious tactical offensives in various parts of the country in 2007. Many other tactical offensives in several other regions have yet to be reported in *Ang Bayan*. In the partial listings already reported in *Ang Bayan*, at least 204 military elements were killed and more than 149 wounded. Nine soldiers and CAFGU elements were captured during encounters and were subsequently released on humanitarian grounds. Elements of AFP death squads involved in extrajudicial killings and abductions were likewise meted punishment after in-depth investigations conducted in accordance with revolutionary judicial processes.

The NPA seized no less than 327 firearms, most of them high-powered rifles; thousands of rounds of ammunition and various military and communications equipment. These weapons and equipment are enough to arm three new companies of Red fighters. Most remarkable among these offensives was the raid on the Davao Penal Colony where Red fighters were able to haul away 108 firearms without firing a single shot.

In accordance with calls from the CPP Central Committee, the entire revolutionary movement is currently focused on all-roundedly improving the conduct of its revolutionary work in order to further advance the people's revolutionary struggles this year and accelerate its attainment of the middle phase of the strategic defensive of the people's war. Even as all the revolutionary forces go all-out in resisting the US-Arroyo regime's suppression and the sufferings it has been imposing on the people, they do so with the clear strategic perspective of seizing political power from the reactionary ruling classes, putting an end to the entirety of semicolonial and semifeudal rule over the country, finishing the national-democratic stage and proceeding to the next stage of the Philippine revolution. AB

Revolutionary victories in Panay


The revolutionary forces in Panay grew in number, enhanced their capabilities and expanded their influence despite ferocious attacks under Oplan Bantay Laya 2 in 2007.

In a statement marking the Party's 39th founding anniversary last December 26, the CPP Regional Committee in the island said thousands of Panayanons participated in the armed struggle and joined the New People's Army or revolutionary mass organizations in their desire to end the US-Arroyo regime.

Many Panayanons saw the need to organize to collectively solve their problems through organs of political power. Mass organizations in the countryside enjoyed a 47% hike in their membership. The NPA, including people's militias saw an 85% increase while the Party registered 20% growth in 2007 despite vicious attacks by the desperate reactionary regime. These were the highest rates of expansion since the Second Great Rectification Movement was launched in 1994 in Panay.

The revolutionary movement in the island achieved these gains despite about ten brigade-size and around a hundred battalion- and company-size operations launched by the 301st Bde in 2007. The reactionary government squandered millions of pesos and further wrought havoc on an already suffering people just to wage a war whose sole purpose is to support the US-Arroyo regime.

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NPA metes punishment on foreign mining company

A platoon of the New People's Army (NPA) attacked the base camp of Sagittarius Mines, Inc. (SMI) in Barangay Tablu, Tampakan, South Cotabato on January 1. The Red fighters disarmed the guards and destroyed mining equipment. In launching the attack, the NPA's intention was to punish the giant Swiss company for engaging in landgrabbing, plunder and environmental destruction, said Communist Party of the Philippines spokesperson Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal.

The CPP spokesperson explained that the raid was timed to coincide with the New Year's break to avoid casualties among SMI's workers and employees. The NPA seized a shotgun, a radio communication set and other equipment.

The military action was an "important milestone in the effort to defend the ancestral domain of the B'laan tribe, the environmental balance of the Liguasan Marsh and the water supply of South Cotabato, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and the General Santos City areas; and resist the Arroyo regime's campaign to auction off the country's natural resources to big foreign capitalists."

It will be remembered that since the 1990s, the people have been actively opposing gold and copper mining operations of Western Mining Corporation (WMC), whose name was later changed to Tampakan Mineral Resources Corporation. In 2002, SMI took over WMC's operations which folded up due to intense people's protests. The mining operations cover the mountain boundaries of Tampakan in South Cotabato, Columbio in Sultan Kudarat and Kiblawan in Davao del Norte.

SMI is currently extending its pre-feasibility study. The company hopes to commence widespread gold and copper mining activities by 2012. There is an estimated 11.6 million tons of copper and 14.6 million ounces of gold in the area. The mining operations which will be undertaken using open pit methods will start by 2010 in the forested villages of Bong Mal, Tablu, Danlag and Folu Bato in Tampakan. "Open pit operations, which are among the most environmentally destructive, will destroy entire forest and watershed areas," said Rosal.

The raid on SMI follows the CPP's general directive of block-

ing and stopping operations of big mining companies that the Arroyo regime has allowed into the country to plunder the country's natural wealth. "The Arroyo regime allows big mining companies in to siphon out billions of dollars worth of the Philippines' natural resources to the detriment of the environment and the people's livelihood." **AB**

NPA raids police detachment in Samar

The New People's Army launched a successful raid against a police station and municipal hall in Hinabangan, Samar on December 23. The Red fighters confiscated an M16, an M14 and three short firearms, according to initial reports. A CAFGU element was killed in the firefight. There were no casualties on the NPA side.

The raid belied the AFP's claims that it was on the verge of decimating the NPA in Eastern Visayas.

CPP spokesperson Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal congratulated the NPA for its attack on the Hinabangan municipal hall and police station. "This shows the determination and capability of the revolutionary forces to defeat the US-Arroyo regime's counterrevolutionary war of terror." **AB**

"Revolutionary..," from page 2

Because of its current armed and political strength, the Communist Party in Panay is now able to enforce revolutionary policies both within and outside guerrilla zones and mete revolutionary justice in an extensive part of the island.

Its influence is bound to grow as the people's consciousness and unity to resist sustained armed attacks by the US-Arroyo regime are raised. Said the CPP in Panay, it is Gloria Arroyo's repressive policies that continually push the people to embrace the armed revolution. **AB**

A factory in the heart of the forest

The New People's Army continually raises the level of its military capabilities along with consolidating the political unity between the masses and their army, in the effort to intensify and raise the level of people's war to a higher level. Part of this effort involves strengthening the NPA war arsenal using all possible weapons against the enemy.

It is in this regard that the NPA put up a "factory" in 2002 in the Ilocos-Cordillera region to produce war materiel. Deep inside a forest, an NPA unit works all day to produce war materiel like grenades and repair weapons of the people's army.

Ka Yani is a poor peasant and a member of a national minority group. He is an excellent carpenter and has extensive military experience. He makes grenade casings.

Ka Piolo—who used to buy bottles and scrap metal and sell fishballs in the streets—files the grenade levers to prevent them from rusting.

Ka Lea is the only woman in the factory. A former domestic helper abroad, she is now a Red fighter and is training on the "shop's" various tasks. She is jokingly called "apprentice."

Ka Iking is also a former overseas worker in Saudi Arabia. A blacksmith, he produces metal parts by pounding glowing hot steel with a huge hammer.

Ka Anino is mild-mannered and is the quiet type. He has been a Red fighter for the past 20 years and is also a member of a national minority group but is of middle class origin. He is in charge of the most sensitive part of producing explosives—making the fuses.

The unit went through a complicated learning process to reach its present level of competence—a process of assiduous creation, experimentation, serious study and creation anew. The group relies on scientific methods and uses locally available raw materials.

Despite the problems it faces, the group continually makes improvements on its products. The grenades it has produced take a year before expiring, whereas its previous products lasted a mere six months. The unit has also become expert in repairing firearms.

Explosives made for the NPA's use are called CDX or command-detonated explosives. Their detonation is controlled to focus their effects on legitimate targets only and prevent civilians from being hurt.

The group's members tirelessly improve on their designs and make refinements on small and sensitive components of war materiel.

There are lively collective exchanges, analyses and improvements on their knowledge and practice in the factory. After production, they conduct daily assessment and resolution meetings before trooping to the mess hall by dusk to eat supper.

"We draw lessons both from our own experiences and the efforts of

earlier comrades who also made simple weapons for defense," said Ka Anino. The unit is particularly known for its intense interest in discovery and learning. The members have also studied many types of military equipment, including unexploded US-made bombs dropped by the AFP.

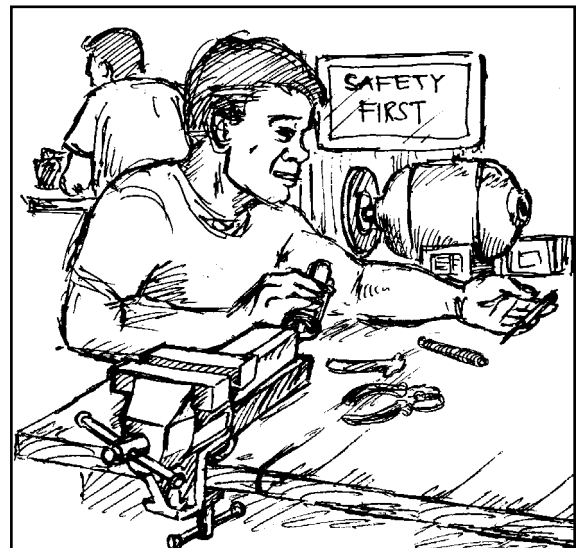
Because there are natural dangers in their line of work, the group exercises the utmost caution. There

are safety rules that everyone follows to the letter. There are ways of avoiding accidents even in doing sensitive tasks. "SAFETY FIRST" are the words that remind everyone to take maximum care. "People are more important than things," they say.

The group is aware of the role played by explosives in the overall advance of people's war.

Explosives are a big help in ensuring the victory of tactical offensives. "Of course, the main factors are good intelligence, planning and training, among others.... But there have been cases when explosives played a critical role in attaining victory in many particular military actions launched by NPA units against numerically superior AFP forces."

This small and extraordinary "factory" will definitely play a big part in the New People's Army's many victorious tactical offensives to come, offensives that will accelerate the overthrow of the reactionary and puppet Arroyo regime. There will be many other "factories" of this kind that will become part of history, nestled in the lushness of the forest and the bosom of a struggling people. **AB**



A deceptive SOMO

Widespread AFP violations exposed the deceptiveness of the suspension of offensive military operations (SOMO) declared by the Arroyo regime from December 16 to January 6. Military men abducted a peasant in Cagayan on Christmas eve and four farmers were arrested, subjected to interrogation and detained in Catanduanes. Military operations continued without letup in these areas despite the Arroyo government's SOMO.

December 24. Elements of the 21st IB abducted Marvin "Piltok" Mendez, 25, in Barangay Virginia, Piat, Cagayan. Mendez, a farmer from Barangay Villagracia, Madela, Quirino went to Piat to visit his friends. Witnesses reported seeing Mendez walking with soldiers with a rifle aimed at him in Barangay Lipatan, Sto. Niño, Cagayan. He was last sighted at the 21st IB camp in Barangay Virginia on December 25 and has yet to be surfaced.

Mendez's abduction is among the 5th ID's violations of the ceasefire declared by the Arroyo government for the Christmas season. Units under the 5th ID have been conducting military operations relentlessly in various towns in Cagayan and Isabela since the first week of December.

December 18. Intensive military operations against MILF guerrillas have displaced more than 1,800 families from Barangays Bohé Suyak, Sungkayot and Tongbato in Tipo-tipo, Basilan. Two soldiers and six civilians were killed when the MILF retaliated against operations launched by elements of the Philippine Marines. The attacking Marines used cannons, thereby pre-

venting residents from celebrating the annual Eid'd Adha or the feast of sacrifice.

December 14-16. Elements of the 65th IB arbitrarily arrested Elvis Santillano, Juanito Lucero Jr. and Bonifacio Solsona in Barangay Iyao, Caramoran, Catanduanes on December 16. The victims, all residents of Barangay Iyao, were subjected to interrogation and illegally detained for four days. A military report to the media falsely identified them as NPA surrenderees. The military continues to have Lucero in its custody.

Another local, JR Velasco, was likewise arbitrarily arrested in Barangay Sabloyon, Caramoran.

Meanwhile, on December 15, elements of the 65th IB intentionally sprayed houses in Barangay Sabloyon with gunfire. One of the houses hit was that of Karen Pia who was home with her three-year old child. To complete the farce that an encounter had taken place between the military and the NPA, another



AFP unit positioned on the other side of the barrio also strafed the village and even detonated a bomb near the barangay school.

The day before, soldiers illegally arrested Edmundo Santillano. He was interrogated and harassed and forced to surrender his shotgun which he used for hunting.

December 12-16. Soldiers abducted farmer Renante Romagus, stabbed him seven times and left him for dead. Romagus, who hails from Monkayo, Compostela Valley was on his way to his farm to make charcoal and harvest bananas for his child's birthday celebration the following day. When he reached Purok 3, Barangay Casoon, however, soldiers of the 28th IB conducting military operations seized him. Blindfolded, gagged and hog-tied, he was tortured and subjected to interrogation from December 13 to 16 at the military detachment in Barangay Rizal on suspicion that he was a member of the New People's Army. On the night of December 16, Romagus was brought by the military to Barangay Hagimitan where he was left for dead. AB

Palparan involved in abduction—Court of Appeals

Brig. Gen. Jovito Palparan and a number of military personnel were involved in the abduction of brothers Reynaldo and Raymond Manalo in 2006, according to the 2nd Division of the Court of Appeals (CA). The declaration was contained in a 30-page decision issued by the court in the last week of December granting a writ of amparo to the Manalo brothers.

General Palparan is the former chief of the Central Luzon-based 7th Infantry Division. The CA said it has been proven that the two brothers were abducted, tortured and detained by elements of the 7th Infantry Division and that this occurred with Palparan's full knowledge. The Manalos related to the court how Palparan himself went to their detention cell to tell them that their relatives should not report to the authorities.

One of Palparan's men identified as among those involved in the abduction—M/Sgt. Donald Caigas—was arrested on other charges but has been able to post bail. Despite the many other cases filed against him,

the Arroyo regime sent him to Haiti to become a member of the United Nations Stabilization Mission.

Karapatan-Central Luzon demanded that Palparan be arrested and charged for his leading role and participation in the series of abductions, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings of activists. **AB**

Missing activists surfaced, in military custody

The 62nd IB temporarily surfaced before the media activist couple Manuel Pajarito and Juliet Fernandez, both of PAMALAKAYA. The presentation was made on December 26. Pajarito and Fernandez were abducted by the military after being accosted at a checkpoint in Pinabacdao, Samar on May 11, 2007. The military imprisoned them for seven months and deprived them of their right to contact their relatives and lawyer. Fernandez, who was three months pregnant when she was abducted, gave birth in prison on November 21.

The two were presented to the media so they could deny reports that they were being abused by the military. Their relatives, friends and organization, however, doubt that they issued their statements freely.

Karapatan said it was common practice for the military to surface abduction victims in exchange for such statements to make it appear that it was the victims' wish to remain in a military prison. The military was in control of everything Pajarito and Fernandez said and did since the presentation to the media was done inside an AFP safehouse.

The military still refuses to divulge the couple's current whereabouts and has still not allowed them to contact their families and lawyer, in violation of their rights.

PAMALAKAYA plans to file a case against elements of the 62nd IB for the illegal arrest and detention or abduction of the two victims. **AB**

Devastation at the Manila North Harbor

In February 2006, the Arroyo regime gave the green light for the privatization of ports at the Manila North Harbor under the Port Modernization Program. The most eager players in the port privatization scheme are all big bourgeois comprador cronies of Gloria Arroyo.

The Manila North Harbor located in Tondo, Manila is one of 11 major harbors in the Philippines. It comprises Piers 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18 and the Veterans Shipyard. Almost all local cargo and passenger sea vessels dock at the Manila North Harbor. There are more than 500 ports in the country, 240 of which are controlled by private individuals and corporations. The Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) has jurisdiction over all these ports.

The entity most interested in the privatization of the North Harbor is the North Harbor Consortium, a group of companies owned by Arroyo cronies. It is composed of Asian Terminals, Inc. owned by Enrique Aboitiz, International Container Terminal Services, Inc. owned by Enrique Razon and Harbour Centre Port Terminals Inc. owned by Reghis Romero. Its rivals include the Pier 8 Arrastre & Stevedoring Services and Prudential Customs Brokerage.

Arroyo has poured in tremendous resources to push the privatization of the Manila North Harbor. In September 2006, the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) announced that it would demolish all urban poor communities from the Manila Hotel up to Navotas town and Radial 10 in Tondo. The demolitions, which have already begun even without the completion of the bidding process,



are intended to clear large tracts of land for the use of the North Harbor's future bourgeois comprador owner. The entire project covers up to 48.5 hectares.

Meanwhile, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) has been busy evicting residents of affected communities. At Mabuhay Road 10, for example, the DSWD has been going around convincing residents to sign waivers prohibiting them from putting up shanties anew after their old ones have been demolished. Residents who sign the documents likewise waive their right to file charges against the DSWD. Each resident will reportedly receive P21,000 in assistance.

Worse, since December 2006, the regime has deployed military units in affected communities in Tondo to suppress the people's resistance to the destructive project. Many human rights violations have since been reported in these areas, among them the illegal arrest and torture last September 5 of 18 residents of Parola Compound by elements of the Philippine Army-National Capital Regional Command. Seventeen of the victims were minors.

The privatization of the North Harbor will deprive 141,500 families or 849,000 individuals of their homes and livelihoods. Affected communities around the North Harbor include Parola, Isla Puting Bato/Breakwater, Collector's Road, Radial 10 and

Barangay 105 which comprises the communities of Aroma, Gloriakrap and Happyland.

Many Tondo residents also derive their incomes from the North Harbor. The harbor employs up to 5,000 Tondo residents, among them 1,000 workers of United Dockhandler's Inc.; 350 workers of Pier 8 Arrastre and Stevedoring Services, Inc.; 400 workers of North Star Port Development Corporation; 250 workers of Isla Puting Bato Arrastre and Stevedoring Corporation; and 250 workers of Veterans Shipyard. Another 1,500 workers are employed by some 200 companies with contracts for various lines of service at the harbor.

Plans to use modern technology once the planned privatization pushes through will mean the massive displacement of the Manila North Harbor's 5,000 workers and employees. The privatization plan has no provisions for their alternative employment. Also to be affected by the mulled privatization are the 2,500 employees of the PPA nationwide.

The planned privatization of the Manila North Harbor is but one of the US-Arroyo regime's many pseudo-development projects catering to the welfare of capitalists to the utter detriment of the poor. It is but right for the residents of communities surrounding the Manila North Harbor to continue resisting this destructive project and assert their rights to decent housing and livelihood. AB

Call centers in the Philippines

Exploitation calls

One of the things that the Arroyo regime likes to brag about is the entry of foreign

businesses in the country. The biggest investments currently come from companies engaged in business process outsourcing, most of them call centers.

A call center is an office that accepts phone calls from customers of various big client companies based in their respective countries. Most of the callers ask for information and assistance from the companies they call or complain about the latter's products or services. Most call center clients are big

banks and transport and computer companies and financial service firms overseas. Most (80%) call centers, on the other hand, are owned by, or are subsidiaries of, US imperialist companies. One example is JP Morgan, one of the world's financing company giants.

There are at present about 225,000 call center employees spread all over the country's main cities. The regime's own statistics claim that call center incomes accounted for 2% of last year's GDP.

The Philippines has one of the biggest number of call centers in the world, and comes second only to India. The regime anticipates that by 2010, call centers will have employed up to a million workers and their incomes will have grown by \$12 billion.

With the regime drooling with anticipation over such huge poten-



tial incomes from call centers, it has pushed for the development of new curricula and practicums for students wishing to become call center agents. Arroyo has even allotted P350 million to the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to train students for future employment in call centers.

Call centers easily attract the educated youth because they offer relatively high salaries (P15,000-P25,000 per month). It is also quite easy to gain entry into these firms because call center companies accept college undergraduates as long as they are relatively fluent in English (enough to pass for Americans) and have average computer skills.

Nonetheless, aside from the fact that such employment is temporary, it is marked by very high rates of exploitation. According to the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU), almost all call center employees are contractual. Most of them have five-month contracts, and stay with their companies for only 18 to 24 months on the average. With unions prohibited in these companies, it is difficult for employees to fight for their job security.

Their higher than average paychecks notwithstanding, they still receive lower salaries compared to their American counterparts who receive three times as much per month. They are also exposed to foreign cultures and lifestyles and mesmerized by consumerism and luxurious living standards. Thus, their salaries are easily frittered away. They also pay high taxes.

Call centers boast of providing a number of benefits to their employees at the office, such as free use of gym equipment, free coffee and free transport to and from train stations, among others.

But they also meet with particular difficulties while working. Many of them fall ill because of working the graveyard shift. Some have severe headaches because of working late and staring at computer monitors for long periods, some develop lung problems because of the very cold temperatures in their offices. There are others who become mentally ill because of the verbal abuse they receive from customers. Many have also become victims of crime because they go to work or leave the office during the unholy hours between midnight and dawn.

In fact, call center companies abuse their agents. Call center work is a dead-end job. All their studies, everything they learned in college and university come to nought as call center agents end up doing nothing but mechanically receive calls from clients of foreign companies based in their respective countries.

Call center agents are now being touted as models of "economic development". In reality, call centers cannot help develop the economy, and in fact worsen the imperialist exploitation of the Philippines, mainly through the exploitation of cheap labor. They thwart genuine economic progress founded on the development of the country's basic industries.

Just like the massive exodus of migrant workers to other countries, rising employment in call centers merely obscures a backward economy, the lack of genuine national industrialization and widespread unemployment in the country. **AB**

Various sectors assail closure of Sulu hospital by US troops

VARIOUS sectors assailed the forcible nighttime closure by American soldiers of a public hospital in Sulu.

Dr. Silak Lakkian, chief of the Panamao District Hospital in Sulu said the orders to close the hospital by 6 p.m. every day were given by a Sergeant Ronburg of the US Army and was implemented starting November 30. Although the US troops never gave a reason for the order, the measure was clearly an attempt to control the movements of civilians after dark. It is an illegal measure that is detrimental to the interests of the people in the area.

Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) chair Rafael "Ka Paeng" Mariano called for an in-depth investigation by the Lower House and the Senate. "This is a clear violation of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and a slap on the face of the Filipino people," he said.

Due to all the brickbats, and to avoid an in-depth investigation as well, the US embassy was forced to rescind the closure orders.

MILF mulls withdrawal from peace talks

NEGOTIATORS of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) plan to withdraw from peace talks with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP).

The MILF charged the GRP of reneging on the consensus points arrived at by both parties in Malaysia last November 15.

Arroyo's propagandists have announced that both parties are set to sign a Memorandum of Agreement based on these consensus points that will allegedly put a stop to the longrunning struggle of the Bangsamoro.

One of the main issues agreed upon in the consensus points is that on "ancestral domain." Gen. Rodolfo Garcia (ret.), chief of the Arroyo government's negotiators, said both parties had already agreed on the

boundaries of the Bangsamoro territory, including those of territorial waters.

The MILF, however, boycotted the next round of talks scheduled in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia last December 17 and exposed the Arroyo government's backtracking on their consensus points in November. After accusations and counter-accusations and a series of armed encounters, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita announced that the issue of "ancestral domain" would be decided on with finality only in a plebiscite conducted on charter change. He said this was in accordance with a memorandum drafted by the GRP conditioning the peace agreement's implementation on compliance with the "constitutional processes" of the Republic of the Philippines.

Worse, General Garcia next announced that the GRP would not talk with the MILF unless the latter surrenders its weapons. In response, the MILF peace panel led by Mohagher Iqbal warned that it would rather withdraw from the talks and wait for a new administration that would be more acceptable to them.

899 American troops killed in Iraq in 2007

THE top brass of the US Armed Forces admitted on December 31 that up to 899 American troops were killed in Iraq in 2007. This is the biggest casualty suffered by American troops since the Bush government occupied Iraq in March 2003.

The casualty count exceeds the 2004 record when 850 American soldiers were killed in the Iraq war. Up to 3,902 US soldiers have been killed in Iraq in the past five years.

US military officials expect their troops to become even more vulnerable to attacks from Iraqi guerrillas because of the gradual troop reduction by other countries in the occupation coalition, among them the United Kingdom, the US' main ally in its invasion of Iraq. Poland and Australia likewise plan to completely withdraw their troops.

Cuba offers medical assistance to the Philippines

CUBA has offered medical assistance to the Philippines to alleviate the effects of the continued loss of medically trained personnel to overseas jobs. This was revealed by Cuban ambassador to the Philippines Jorge Roy Jimenez in an interview in December 2007. The ambassador said the Cuban government was still awaiting the Arroyo government's response to its offer.

Cuba is teeming with doctors and other medical personnel, according to their ambassador. Thus, it offers medical assistance to countries in need of it as part of its international work. Cuba has 17,000 doctors and dentists doing service in Venezuela in exchange for 100,000 barrels of oil per day for Cuba.

There is one doctor for every 158 persons in Cuba. In the US, there is one doctor for every 150 people. Meanwhile, in the Philippines, there is one doctor for every 10,000 to 26,000 Filipinos. This ratio worsens as more and more doctors go abroad.

Despite the alarming state of medical care in the country, the present government has implemented only token measures to improve its health program. This, despite the unrelenting migration of doctors, dentists, nurses and other health professionals. Up to 51,885 nurses went abroad from 2000 to 2003.